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AUTHOR Hatcher, Maxine A.; Penner, Louis
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ABSTRACT

Although women continue to obtain full-time jobs at ever increasing rates, they remain dramatically underrepresented at the managerial level. To examine the impact of physical attractiveness and job type (traditional or nontraditional), and the interaction of these two factors on attributions about women's competence, 174 working adults (76 males and 98 females) were presented with a bogus job resume of a high ranking female corporate employee. Attached to each resume was a picture of the woman, previously classified as attractive, unattractive, or average. Job type was also manipulated with the woman shown as director of a male or female oriented company. Subjects responded to attributions for success on job-related characteristics (e.g., ability and experience) and non job-related characteristics (e.g., personality, appearance, affirmative action quotas); rated each women on a series of bipolar adjectives addressing either competence or character; and completed the Woman as Manager Scale (WAMS). Results indicated that males exhibited a generally positive bias toward the attractive stimulus person, while females attributed attractive persons' success to external factors such as appearance or knowing someone in the company. Males' positive attitudes toward women in managerial roles were associated with more favorable attributions. However, women with high WAMS scores made more positive job-related and non job-related attributions for women in traditional jobs and attributed their success to affirmative action programs. The findings suggest the presence of subtle discrimination issues, especially for women who do not match the cultural standard of attractiveness. (JAC)

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BEAUTY AND THE BOSS: A MIXED BLESSING

Maxine A. Hatcher
Louis Penner
University of South Florida
Presented at SEPA, March 26, 1983

406 Joyce Avenue
Temple Terrace, FL 33617
(813) 988-2527 (home)
(813) 974-2492 (Psychology Department)

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Beauty and the Boss:
A Mixed Blessing

One of the original and continuing goals of the woman's movement has been to eliminate discrimination directed towards women in the labor market. As a result of the efforts of people concerned with this problem, most major corporations in America no longer have codified procedures which would produce discriminatory practices in hiring, promotion and pay. However, it is clear that women still suffer from sex discrimination when they enter the job market. One area where the problem seems especially acute is at the managerial or executive level. Although women continue to obtain full-time jobs at ever increasing rates, they remain dramatically underrepresented at the managerial level. While a number of factors are responsible for this, the present study concentrated on the role that widely held attitudes and stereotypes about women may contribute to this problem.

To be more specific, we examined the impact of three variables. The first was physical attractiveness. There is an extensive social psychological literature which indicates that what is "beautiful is competent and good". That is, people tend to associate physical attractiveness with competence, morality, intelligence and a host of other positive characteristics (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster, 1972; Berscheid, Walster, and Campbell, 1972). It is perhaps their findings which have led women to "dress for success".

But is success an unmitigated blessing for the female manager? There is both anecdotal and research evidence which suggests it is not. Consider the Mary Cunningham "incident". Mary Cunningham was an honors graduate with an MBA from Harvard University. She was promoted to a vice presidency at Bendix Corporation. However, within days of her promotion, the rumor that she had been dating her boss swept through the corporate world. Ms. Cunningham resigned in a flurry of public and private speculation about her competence.

What were the factors which led to Ms. Cunningham's downfall? The attribution theory literature and research on sex role stereotypes suggests the following explanation. Women are not generally perceived to possess the characteristics required of someone who is performing a traditionally male job (Schein, 1973; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson and Rosenkrantz, 1972). Thus, the observers had to provide another explanation or attribution for her success. Ms. Cunningham's physical attractiveness provided this explanation. That is, she had obtained her position by virtue of her physical appearance rather than her job related skills. In a phrase, she had slept her way to the top. This real world incident led us to the second variable of interest--the type of job a woman holds. That is, we investigated whether the type of job a woman holds would negate the positive perceptions people have of an attractive woman? Indeed, would people use a woman's physical attractiveness as a means of explaining her success in a traditionally male job?

Finally, we investigated the impact of the subjects' attitudes toward women in managerial roles on their perceptions of a successful business woman. The decision to investigate this variable was based on the common sensical idea that when faced with an attributional dilemma--a woman who is successful in a role where success is not typically expected of women--subjects' own attitudes will influence the attributions they make.

Physical appearance, job type, and subjects' attitudes were examined in a completely crossed factorial design. Physical appearance and job type were systematically manipulated and presented to male and female subjects who differed in their attitudes toward women in managerial roles. In order to make the results of this study ecologically valid, the subjects were adult individuals who were employed. Three general questions were asked.

First, what would be the impact of physical attractiveness on the subjects' attributions? Would subjects favor attractive women? Second, how would the type of job a woman held influence the subjects' attributions? Would subjects be more positive toward women who held traditional or nontraditional jobs? More importantly, how would physical attractiveness and job type interact? Would the type of interaction suggested by the Mary Cunningham incident be obtained? Finally, how would the attitudes of the subjects influence their perceptions?

Subjects.

Subjects were working adults (76 males and 98 females) involved in continuing education classes at two local colleges. Mean age for females was 35. Mean age for males was 37. Educational level as 14 years for women and 15 years for men.

Procedure.

Subjects were presented with a bogus job resume' of a woman who had achieved a high level of success in a large corporation. They were asked to review each resume' as if they were making a hiring decision about the person presented. Attached to each resume' was a picture of the woman. These pictures were, in fact, photos which had been taken from magazines and rated for attractiveness by a separate group of subjects. On the basis of these ratings the stimulus persons were classified as attractive, average or unattractive. Two stimulus persons were used within each level of attractiveness.

Job type was manipulated by presenting the woman shown as the director of accounting for a male oriented company or director of personnel for a female oriented company. A pilot study had shown that these jobs were perceived either as traditionally held by males or traditionally held by

females, respectively and that these two jobs did not differ in status. Job resumes were identical across levels of attractiveness with past experience reflecting the appropriate work experiences.

After reading the resumes, the subjects answered a series of questions concerned with their perceptions of the stimulus persons. There were two general sets of questions. The first addressed the attributions subjects offered for the woman's success. There were two groups of attributions, those which concerned job-related characteristics (e.g., effort, ability, experience) and those which concerned non job-related characteristics (e.g., personality, physical appearance, affirmative action quotas, etc.). The second set of questions asked the subjects to rate the woman on a series of bipolar adjectives. These adjectives addressed either the woman's competence (e.g., competent, intelligent, hard working, etc.) or her character (e.g., moral, manipulative, seductive, etc.). In addition, the second set of questions contained a check of the effectiveness of the manipulation of physical attractiveness.

Finally, the subjects filled out the Woman As Managers Scale (WAMS, Peters, Terborg and Taynor, 1974). This scale measures the attitudes of subjects toward women working in management positions.

Results

Preliminary Analysis. A comparison of the WAMS scores revealed significant differences between the distribution of scores for men and women. Therefore, medians were computed separately for each gender and subjects were classified as high or low on the WAMS on the basis of their within gender distributions. This resulted in separate analyses for males and females. Another analysis disclosed that the manipulation of physical attractiveness was effective.

Mode of Analysis. A 3 x 2 x 2 between subjects factorial design was used. The classification variables were attractiveness (attractive, average, unattractive), job type (traditional, nontraditional) and WAMS scores (high, low). The dependent measures were empirically clustered based on a factor analysis and subjected to MANOVAS followed by ANOVAS for individual items. Items which did not load on any factor were analyzed alone. All results reported below are significant at the .05 level. Results with significant ANOVAS but nonsignificant MANOVAS are reported due to the exploratory nature of the study (Table 1 and Table 2). In the interest of clarity and brevity, the results will be presented in terms of the questions asked in the introduction.

What was the impact of physical appearance?

Male subjects displayed a clear cut positive bias in favor of the attractive stimulus person. That is, she was seen as more able, experienced, skilled and competent (but also more feminine and seductive) than were her less attractive counterparts. Female subjects showed an opposite pattern. They attributed the attractive woman's job success to non job-related characteristics (e.g., knowing someone, physical attractiveness, affirmative action quotas, etc.)

to a significantly greater extent than they did the success of the less attractive women.

What was the impact of the job type?

Job type, by itself, did not impact the subjects perceptions. In retrospect, it is possible that the level of the job held by the stimulus person overwhelmed the sex type of the job. Job type did interact with the other variables and will be discussed below.

What was the impact of subjects' attitudes?

Among male subjects, those with high scores on the WAMS saw the stimulus persons as possessing more of the job related characteristics (e.g., ability) than did subjects with low scores on the WAMS. High scorers also saw the stimulus persons as more likely to be successful and as having a better character (i.e., more moral, better adjusted, more forthright) than did low scorers. Among women, however, high scorers saw the stimulus persons as more feminine and more manipulative than did low scorers.

Interactions.

Appearance and Job Type. There were significant interactions among male subjects, but not females. Male subjects did not differ in their attributions about attractive and average stimulus persons, however, they did describe the unattractive woman in the nontraditional job as less able than the same woman in the traditional job.

Appearance and Attitudes. Males with low WAMS scores tended to attribute the success of the woman of average appearance to knowing someone in the company to a significantly greater extent than did high WAMS males. The same trend was demonstrated for the measure effort. Males with high WAMS scores tended to attribute the success of the woman of average appearance to effort

to a greater extent than did low WAMS males. Among females, high WAMS subjects saw the attractive woman as significantly more intelligent than did low WAMS females.

Job Type and Attitudes. Among female subjects, low WAMS subjects described stimulus persons in traditionally female jobs as more able than stimulus persons in nontraditional jobs. However, high WAMS subjects attributed affirmative action as a reason for success to women in traditional jobs more than to women in nontraditional jobs and they also attributed greater morality and competence to women in traditional jobs than to women in nontraditional jobs.

Table 1

Results for Male Subjects

Main Effects

Attractiveness	F mult	F univariate
Ability	F (8,118)=1.91 $p < .07$	F (2,63)=3.57 $p < .03$
Skill	F (8,118)=1.91 $p < .07$	F (2,63)=3.45 $p < .04$
Experience	F (8,118)=1.91 $p < .07$	F (2,63)=4.28 $p < .02$
Feminine		F (2,64)=3.58 $p < .04$
Seductive		F (2,64)=3.86 $p < .02$
Competence		F (2,64)=5.35 $p < .007$
WAMS		
Adjusted	F (3,61)=4.58 $p < .006$	F (1,64)=11.49 $p < .001$
Expect to be Successful	F (2,63)=2.39 $p < .1$	F (1,64)=5.88 $p < .02$
Ability	F (4,60)=4.20 $p < .005$	F (2,64)=10.68 $p < .002$
Forthright	F (3,61)=4.58 $p < .006$	F (1,63)=7.55 $p < .008$
Interactions		
Job Type x WAMS		
Luck		F (1,64)=6.76 $p < .01$
Moral	F (3,61)=1.56 $p < .2$	F (1,63)=4.53 $p < .04$
Attractiveness X WAMS		
Effort	F(8,122)=1.09 $p < .4$	F (2,63)=3.18 $p < .05$
Knowing Someone	F (6,124)=1.45 $p < .2$	F (2,63)=3.74 $p < .03$
Attractiveness x Job Type		
Ability	F (8,122)=1.28 $p < .3$	F (2,63)=3.2 $p < .05$

Note: Items with nonsignificant multivariate F's reported here due to exploratory nature of the study.

Table 2

Results for Female Subjects

Main Effects

Attractiveness	F mult	F univariate
Feminine		F (2,85)=6.83 p< .002
Affirmative Action		F (2,85)=3.32 p< .05
Physical Attractiveness	F (6,166)=2.83 p< .01	F (2,84)=5.73 p< .004
Knowing Someone	F (6,166)=2.83 p< .01	F (2,84)=2.71 p< .07
WAMS		
Feminine		F (1,85)=3.88 p< .05
Forthright	F (3,83)=1.54 p< .21	F (1,85)=4.62 p< .03

Interactions

WAMS x Job Type		
Affirmative Action		F (1,85)=4.29 p< .05
Ability	F (4,82)=2.34 p< .06	F (2,85)=7.09 p< .009
Competence		F (1,85)=4.15 p< .05
Moral	F (3,83)=3.36 p< .02	F (1,85)=6.7 p< .01
WAMS x Attractiveness		
Intelligence		F (2,85)=3.91 p< .02
WAMS x Job Type x Attractiveness		
Competence		F (2,85)=3.61 p< .03
Ability	F (8,166)=1.72 p< .1	F (2,85)=4.52 p< .01
Effort	F (8,166)=1.72 p< .1	F (2,85)=4.13 p< .02

Note: Items with nonsignificant multivariate F's reported here due to exploratory nature of the study.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicated that the impact of the independent variables differed rather markedly as a function of subject gender. Consider first, how males and females responded to the physical attractiveness of the stimulus persons. Male subjects exhibited a generally positive bias toward the attractive stimulus person. Although she was seen as seductive, more importantly she was also seen as a more competent and deserving manager than the unattractive woman. Evidently for the male subjects, the general stereotype that what is beautiful is good still held and this positive bias was not mitigated by the type of job the woman held. Female subjects also used the physical attractiveness stereotype but they used it differently. Female subjects' attributed the success of the attractive stimulus person to external factors, e.g., knowing someone in the company and physical attractiveness. These attributions are not necessarily denigrating to the accomplishments of the attractive stimulus person. Rather, they may be interpreted as a reflection of "how it is" in the work place, as perceived by the female subjects. In fact, examination of the male subjects' scores suggests that they are correct. The physically attractive woman has a non job-related advantage.

The impact of the subjects' attitudes also differed between males and females. Among males, positive attitudes toward women in managerial roles were associated with more favorable attributions. Furthermore, there was a trend to suggest that male subjects' attitudes had the greatest impact on the stimulus person of average appearance. In other words, when appearance was not salient, male subjects' attitudes toward women in management had the greatest impact on their attributions.

Among women, however, the results are much less straightforward. Interestingly, women with high WAMS scores made more positive job-related and non-

job-related attributions to women in traditional jobs than to women in nontraditional jobs but they also attributed reason for success for women in traditional jobs to affirmative action programs. Intuitively, one would have expected high WAMS scorers to be more positive about the women in non-traditional jobs.

There are two possible explanations for the inconsistent results for the effects of womens' attitudes on attributions. First, the WAMS is an extremely transparent measure. Thus, the women may have been responding in a socially desirable fashion rather than in terms of their true attitudes. Alternatively, the WAMS may have provided a valid measure of the womens' attitudes but these attitudes did not influence the womens' perceptions in the expected manner. That is, the high WAMS women, while they favor women in management, may also believe that women succeed in male jobs because of non job-related factors. Thus, the attributions of the high WAMS women may again reflect the view of "how things are" rather than a bias against women in nontraditional jobs. In this context it should be noted that since fewer women than men in this study indicated that they had actually made decisions like the one portrayed by the stimulus materials, their attributions were based more on conjecture.

Further research is needed to better understand the cognitive framework that these high WAMS female subjects are using. Some indepth interviewing should precede any further generation of hypotheses in this area. The next step is to sit down with women and discuss why they responded as they did. This will set the stage for more precise hypotheses in future studies.

This study does suggest that there are more subtle discrimination issues to be addressed in the work place by women who are interested in success at the upper levels of the corporate structure. Furthermore, these issues are particularly salient for women who do not match the cultural standard of attractiveness.

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